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TRUMPCAST

“I Didn’t See It as a Crime. I Saw It as My Mistake.”

E. Jean Carroll talks to Virginia Heffernan and Dahlia Lithwick about her sexual assault allegations against the president.

BY VIRGINIA HEFFERNAN AND DAHLIA LITHWICK

JUNE 27, 2019 • 10:14 PM



E. Jean Carroll is seen in an undated photo released on Tuesday. E. Jean Carroll/Handout via Reuters

On the newest episode of Trumpcast, Virginia Heffernan and Dahlia Lithwick were joined by E. Jean Carroll. Carroll’s new book, out next Tuesday, is *What Do We Need Men For?*, and in it, she alleges that Donald Trump sexually assaulted her in a Bergdorf Goodman dressing room in the 1990s. An essay describing the encounter was published by New York magazine last Friday, and on Thursday morning, Carroll appeared on the New York Times’ *The Daily* to

explain why she doesn't describe what happened to her as "rape," despite the fact that she alleges Trump forced intercourse with her without her consent.

Carroll talked about her book, her allegation, and what she wants to come of all of it with Heffernan and Lithwick on the show. What follows is an excerpt of that conversation, which has been edited and condensed for clarity.

E. Jean Carroll: Listen, I will admit to you, I was flirting my brains out. I thought that choosing a handbag or getting a present for a young woman, which he asked me to advise him about, was, you know, I was thrilled. I thought how hilariously funny this whole thing was going to be. I had made jokes, accompanied him through the handbags, through the hats. I went up with him on the escalator when he suggested lingerie, and I thought it was getting juicier and more delicious, because it was such a great scene. So, yeah.

Virginia Heffernan: I think Jia Tolentino had a piece about the different reactions to sexual assault, that you're either too game or you're not game enough, and you were definitely in the game category and I identify that that was the sort of spirit of the age: that you were just throwing off the shackles, you were just in it for the adventure, and that's true.

Carroll: The adventure, that's true.

Heffernan: But then you were a very close eyewitness to a crime. Even if all he had done was try to beat you up, or he tried to put his fingers in your vagina or half of his penis or whatever, all of that is a crime, no matter how it affects you.

Dahlia Lithwick: And no matter what you call it. You can call it rape or you can call it whatever, but it's still a crime, right?

Carroll: I didn't see it as a crime. I saw it as my mistake.

Heffernan: Well, Stormy Daniels also does not call the sexual encounter [forced], and Karen McDougal also doesn't call those sexual encounters forced or say that they were nonconsensual. But the actions around it, the actions to cover it up or to reject them or to pay them off or to slight them in public space—

Carroll: Oh no, that's horrible. That's a crime. See, I can see that clearly ... with me, I was banged up against a wall and I quickly learned that it was not as funny, and I knew I was in a fight, yeah.

Heffernan: That's when things got not funny.

Carroll: Yeah, then I stopped, because my idea of it was to make him put on a bodysuit, this scrawny little bodysuit, and that left my head, and then I was ... but even then, I didn't think it was a crime. I just thought, *Get the hell out of here, E. Jean, you idiot*. You know how you're ... you guys have both been at rock climbing, and you get caught out on a ledge and you think, *How the hell did I get here?*

Heffernan: Yeah.

Carroll: You know? You just really screwed up and that was basically my feeling until the adrenaline poured through. My thing was to get out of it. It wasn't to call it a word or anything like that. It was to get out of it.

Heffernan: So, what would you say if I told you this story or someone wrote in to your column for advice? I write in and I say, "Auntie E., I ran into a rich guy in a fancy department store and he bashed my head up against the wall and put his penis in me, and I had to fight to get away. What should I do?"

Carroll: He raped you. I want you to go and talk immediately with someone that you trust and I want you to consider going to the police. Telling a woman to go to the police can sometimes be another horrible experience for her. I would tell her to speak with someone she loves and trusts, possibly go to a therapist and consider going to the police. And I've actually written that. I published answers on how to do that. So yeah, thanks, Virginia, you've nailed me and that's why I finally came forward. This very thing, and I could no longer do it, because women started, after the Harvey Weinstein story broke open, that very week, I started to get lots of letters from women asking me—of all people—should they report their bad boss? Should they report their stepson who is molesting her child?

It was coming on my shoulders. And these were all crimes I was reading about. I just realized I was ... please, you know, who am I? I had to really tell my readers, whom I love, I had to tell them that this has happened to me. I said it was my fault, I screwed up, you know ... that I had to come clean. That was one of the big portions of why I did it.

Lithwick: So, you have to help us because we're struggling now, because you're saying, "It's my story. I won't call it rape. I fought back ..." I loved what you said to *The Daily*. You said, "Every woman gets to choose how she describes it. This is my word," and yet at the same time you're saying if young Virginia wrote to you, you would say it's a rape. So, help us reconcile these two things, because I'm struggling and I think that you're completely right to say that other people should not be judging you on the words you use. But you're also using two words.

Carroll: I'm using them for a woman who writes in. I can tell her, in my opinion, that's rape, but I hate it when people tell me in their opinion that I was raped. Because I see it as a fight. This way I can hold my head up, and I can respect myself because I knew I fought. It's just my way of taking care of myself.

Lithwick: And can I ask one quick follow-up? You are by no means saying that women have to fight ... because I think that's what people out there are mad about—it's that they think that you're telling young girls, like, "You better fight or it's not rape." That's not what you're saying.

Carroll: No, no, no, because many women freeze, many women scream, many women are caught unawares by a family member and don't move. I personally have been in that situation where I didn't move, as a camp counselor ... that was for two to three weeks, and I never moved. I sat there at the dinner table, under the table. I didn't move. So, I'm not trying to, you know—I'm just saying this felt different. Because I was a grown-up at the time. ■

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